

## **Religion and Literature: Tagore's Spiritual Humanism in Gitanjali**

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**Abstract:** *Tagore is the greatest of the Indians writing in English. His fame as a poet in English rests chiefly on his Gitanjali which is a "transcreation" of the Bengali original. It was with this work that he achieved international fame and recognition, and was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature. His message is spiritual, both Hindu and universal at one and the same time. In this poetry Indianness acquires a universal significance. Stress on Tagore's mysticism has led to the neglect of his poetry, it has tended to obscure his greatness as a poet and artist. He perfected a kind of incantatory rhythmic prose and demonstrated that Indian sentiment, thought and imagery can be as well expressed in English as in any Indian language." This paper highlights Tagore's Spiritual Humanism in Gitanjali.*

**Key Words:** *Tagore, Gitanjali, Spiritual, Universal.*

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### **I. Introduction**

Tagore is not an escapist. He believes in detachment, asceticism and deliverance but all these are counterbalanced with his love of humanism. He is not a staunch believer of renunciation of world of senses. He believes that relationship of soul with God, needs the relationship with the man. Tagore says that the God lies among the human beings. He is in you, me and every living being so to love everyone in this world is to love the Almighty and to serve mankind is to serve the Supreme, Immanent will. God is not to be found in the temple but with the lowest and humblest.

"Here is thy foot stool and there rest thy feet where live the poorest, and lowliest and lost". (Poem no 10) He castigates the idolatry and blind worship. He criticizes in poem no 11.

"Leave this chanting and singing and telling of beads! Whom dost thou worship in this lonely dark corner of a temple with doors all shut? Open thine eyes and see thy God is not before thee!" (Poem 11) He is there among the tiller, the stone breaker and honest labourers. He lives with those poor hard workers whose "garments is covered with dust." He keeps company with companionless. The rich and the bourgeoisie are far removed from God because of the artificial living. That is why Bible says; "Blessed are the poor for thy shall see God"

"Raise the stone and there thou shalt find me, cleave the wood and there I am."  
He condemns asceticism or complete renunciation as 'evasiveness' from your worldly duties:  
"Deliverance? Where is this deliverance to be found? Our master himself has joyfully taken upon him the bonds of creation; he is bound with us all for ever". God himself is bound by this world. So how can the mortals throw off their bondage?

The poem makes a disparagement of life of renunciation and praises the life of action. His tone is of a humanist. He has no sympathy for those who give a slip to life. Although he was a born aristocrat, the dominant note in Gitanjali is that of human dignity and equality. He castigates the Indian tradition of exclusiveness and isolation. He criticizes the discrimination. His belief that Man cannot ignore his fellowmen and still hope to realise God, for God is with needy and poor rather than with priest and the prince. Tagore's humanism is also reflected in his poem no 35 where he prays for his country's redemption. He cries for Heaven of freedom". He wants a country where there should be no divisions of caste, creed and nationality. The theme of humanism in itself covers the hollowness of Indian traditional and rituals. The uselessness of religious rituals which are so characteristic of orthodox Hinduism. The idol worship and performance of rites and ceremonies is being criticized. As in poem no 64 Tagore says that the dark house of poor poet is left aloof and dark amid the useless burning lamps. He pleases the girl to enlighten his house but she is busy with hollow rites of dedicating the lamps to river and sky. The lights are believed to reach the souls of departed ancestors. The rich people want to dedicate their lamps to the empty sky and let them uselessly burn in the open air whereas the poor live in darkness as they can't afford even the light. Tagore through this satirizes the pomp and callousness of the upper middle classes who are indifferent to the suffering to their poor brethren.

The dominating spirit of Gitanjali is the quest of God and man realizes Him only after the spiritual illumination. The poem begins his poem with a belief that man is a 'frail vessel' whose own existence is short-

lived and God fills it 'with fresh life'. His 'immortal touch' gives man joy. He is all-pervasive, immanent, life of life, truth, love, source of power and illumination that is why man should try to make himself worthy of union with God. Self purification is essential for the mystic union with the God and from here starts his voyage for union. He asks for 'a moment's indulgence' to sit by His side. He feels restless when he is away from God. He knows that the communion with humanity and a participation in ordinary human activity is essential for the enjoyment and spiritual growth. He feels His presence, His foot stool among the poorest, lowest, and lost. The man, poet, still craves to meet Him but he finds himself chained with sensual pleasures. His baser self who is proudly, assertive, arrogant and egoistic is a barrier between his lofty, individual soul and the Infinite. His quest of life consists in the daily effort to crush that pettier, proudly self; to let the lofty one grow in power and place it firmly on the throne before completing this earthly pilgrimage. These two parted self make the man pass through two stages. One gives joy and sorrow, parting and meeting and other one gives the joy of spirituality and detachment. The poet believes that these two parts petty one and lofty one can't be parted. They are like light and shadow. It is difficult to get rid of this petty self. It is this which forms the ego of a person. Tagore says

"I came out alone on my way to my tryst. But who is this that follows me in the silent dark?"

"I move aside to avoid his presence but I escape him not."

"He is my own little self, my lord, he knows no shame; but I am ashamed to come to thy door in his company."

And Tagore knows that "Pride can never approach to where thou walkest." cries for the freedom from these worldly temptations and his grief is great due to the separation from God. But when the sudden spiritual illumination comes to him which he ignores many a times, he comes to know that He is there in him, beside him. He is a part of this Almighty. God severed himself to create man. "Thou settest a barrier in thine own being and then callest thy severed self in myriad notes. This thy self-separation has taken body in me." All His creation is this part separated from Him. He is there in clouds, leaves, streams, golden light of sun and chirping of birds. This self-revelation, realisation of God's presence in him is the spiritual illumination which makes his way easy from the sea of eternity. Realising the Supreme one as a spirit in the finite one is the sudden illumination which elevates the soul with enjoyment and satisfaction.

One of the poem in Tagore's collection of various themes pleas for charity. This poem is in a form of parable which asserts the importance of this virtue. The poem no 50 expresses Tagore's message that one gets in proportion to what one sacrifices. The poet in the guise of beggar goes begging from door to door, till he beholds a price in a glorious chariot. He expects the big amount in alms which the prince will give him. But the act of prince shocks him when he himself extends his palm towards him and asks him what he has to give him. The avarice of poet allows him to give him the smallest grain of corn. As a reward he finds at his house in his wallet a gold grain. He repents and realises the value of giving. The parable has a mythical background of Krishna and Sudama. Sudama, the friend of Lord Krishna in utter poverty remembers his friend and visits him in his rags. He offers Krishna some stale corn meal he carried with him. Each morsel that Krishna takes, makes Sudama wealthier. Sudama finds him flooded with wealth and splendour. Such is the power of virtue of charity, one of the dominant themes of poem no 50.

## **II. Conclusion**

Thus the variety and abundance of themes makes Gitanjali, a source of eternal fascination. Certainly the greatest poet of yesteryears Rabindranath Tagore with his sublimity and themes surpassed the man kind with human touch and grace to make Gitanjali, the spiritual vendor to the whole world.